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THE ROD, OR THE SWORD.

THE
PRESENT DILEMMA
OF THE
N A T I O N S
OF
ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND,
CONSIDERED,
ARGUED AND IMPROVED,

I N

A D I S C O U R S E

From EZEK. Chap. xxi. ver. 13.

BY ROBERT FLEMING, V. D. M. *the Younger*.

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the Rise and Fall of Papacy.

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JER. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10, &c.

—At what instant I speak concerning a Nation, to build and
plant it: if it do evil in my sight, then I will repent of the
good wherewith I said I would benefit them, &c.

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1794.



TO ALL
SERIOUS AND FAITHFUL
MINISTERS OF CHRIST,

By whatever name or designation distinguished,
The Author wisheth increase of grace and ability,
and further success in the Ministerial Office.

Very Reverend and worthy Fathers and Brethren,

WHEN upon the reiterated and pressing desire of friends,
I had given my consent to the publication of the following discourse, I could not admit the thoughts of dedicating it to any particular patron; as judging it a kind of injustice to make any inclosure, or particular approbation of what does, in its subject and scope, equally concern all.

Therefore it is, that I take the boldness to inscribe this little tractate to you, my very Reverend fathers and brethren, since it is your office as faithful watchmen and seers, to enquire what time of the night it is, and to give the people committed to your charge faithful warning of apparent sin and danger, and accordingly to direct our Israel, what they ought to do.

And since it is the true reformed interest that is now at stake, I think it is more than time to leave off contending among ourselves, in which kind of apparel or fashion religion makes the best or most decent appearance, since our united endeavours are now called for (and all little enough) to defend religion itself against the formidable appearance of Atheism and profanity on the one hand, and of an Idolatrous mock-religion on the other. Therefore it is, that I have inscribed this so generally to you all; as judging the Christian religion to stand in those essential truths, wherein I hope we are agreed, and not in those metaphysical speculations in doctrine, or circumstantial of worship, which men of little souls, by a furious bigotry, have so long made use of, out of mere humour, or with design to disunite and divide us.

It is no way material, I suppose, to know the obscure name of him, who makes bold thus to address you; for if there

there be not force and energy enough in what is here dis-
courfed, to awaken men to a serious sense of danger and
duty, the knowledge of the Author is never like to do it.
However, he begs pardon here in the dark, both for the
boldness and importunity of the dedication, and the im-
perfections of the small treatise itself, which he lays now be-
fore you: for both which, he can only say for his excuse,
that from the apprehensions he has of the church's and na-
tions danger in the present crisis, he thought it is his duty to
do what he could in the case, though he is justly apprehensive
he may not have performed his part in this as he ought.

But what is defective here, may the Lord stir up others
of greater abilities to supply. And oh! that this small ef-
fay may be so happy, as thus to occasion others more vigo-
rously to bestir themselves to stem the swelling and growing
tide of the manifold evils that threaten us this day with ruin.

This, this, is the earnest and humble petition of the
meanest of your number, that you would resolutely and
vigorously oppose and resist the present dreadful increase of
infidelity and irreligion, with their concomitant evils;
which seem to be the sad and fatal fore-runners of misery.
Which noble and generous undertaking, how difficult soever
it may appear to be, ought not to be reckoned by any in
vain: for who -knows but that God is only waiting for
such an occasion, to exert his Almighty power further on
our behalf? However, it is sure, that in doing thus you
shall not lose your reward whatever happen; were it but
this, that it will certainly be accompanied with inward sa-
tisfaction and peace of mind, and the light of God's coun-
tenance made to shine upon you.

Now the Lord himself, with whom the residue of the
Spirit is, incite and stir you up to this important under-
taking, direct and assist you in it, and make it successful to the
further lengthening out our peace and settlement. In all
which respects, may the blessings of Heaven ever attend and
reward you, until these happy streams of paradise, uniting
together in the fulness and consummation, unite you also
with the great and best good, even the beatific vision and
fruition of God himself, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE
PRESENT DILEMMA
OF THESE
NATIONS
CONSIDERED,
ARGUED AND IMPROVED, &c.

EZEK. Chap. xxi. ver. 13. — *And what if the Sword
contemn even the Rod? It shall be no more, saith
the Lord God.*

IT is now above four years since the first *dawning* of the late happy *Revolution*; which seemed so much the more auspicious, that it bears the date from ~~a~~ *second fifth of November*, and that in another *eighty-eighth*; which hereby became, on a double account, a year of wonders. The rising of a glorious and bright *Sun* in the *West*, where a little before *one* did set in blood, was such an unexpected and surprising reverse to the then *scene* and constitution of affairs, that it was no wonder, if the generality of those who wished well to their religion and country, were transported, and as it were swallowed up with the pleasant ideas of affairs, which such an alteration gave them: for little did men, but a while before, imagine, that so radiant and illustrious ~~a~~ *morning* would have followed so quickly that bloody and stormy *sunset*, which had been looked upon by

many, as a sad *prelude* of worse things to follow. This was then the almost universal frame and disposition of men's minds: which, as it did awaken them to reflect on what was either new to them, or fresh in their memories; so it did much lull asleep the rational prospect of what might hence have been expected to ensue. But the greatest evil that these nations were then guilty of, was a too universal *forgetfulness* of, and *ingratitude* to God, the great and first cause of all those mercies; who had appeared in all that affair, as by an arm stretched forth from the clouds, so as to fulfil that word eminently in our case, *That not by might, nor by strength, but by his own Spirit he had saved us*: by his Spirit, I say, whereby he incited and spirited some, dejected and dispirited others, and so universally turned the hearts of men of all ranks and orders into a new channel, that the *vox populi* in this case seemed very remarkably to be *vox Dei*: I say, notwithstanding all these things, our ingratitude was as visible as it was great, in attributing to man what was in the first place the work of the Almighty: which was followed with a too visible reliance on human policy, and an arm of flesh; to the seeming abandoning of that kind Providence, wherein we had before so happily embarked. And from this fatal step, might a serious observer have perceived our wheels begin to drive heavily, and our bow so oft to return empty; whilst in the mean time our *enemies* began to awaken out of their amaze, and encourage themselves again to attempt what for a while they seemed to despair of. Then it was, that we saw the *sword* drawn on both sides, and with greater ardency than ever: which hath still continued without cessation, and without that *success* against the common enemy, which, from the *confederacy* of so many princes we had expected. It is true indeed, and we must gratefully acknowledge it to God's praise, that the groans of poor *Ireland*, and the prayers put up on that account, have at last been heard and mercifully answered.

swered. But yet our distractions at home, and the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war from abroad, are such as may be sufficient to awaken us to consider what the Lord speaks to us at this time, by all these things. *The voice of the Lord is yet crying to city and country; but who is that man of wisdom, that doth see God's name, or understand the voice of his dispensations, even of that rod which lies still upon us? which if we altogether contemn, I heartily wish, we may not be forced to hear the sword ere it be long.*

We are at present (if I mistake not greatly) under very dark and intricate circumstances: and, in the mean time, *we see not our signs, neither seems there to be any among us, who knoweth how long.* If we call to the watchmen, and ask, *what of the night?* who is there that give us any distinct answer? I know, indeed, that extraordinary prophecy is ceased, and that therefore they may justly be suspected, as being either deceivers, or deceived, who pretend to it. And yet, that God may, at sometimes thus reveal things hidden and secret, to some of his own children, who dare so far limit the holy one of *Israel* as to deny? But it is not this that I bewail here, but *something* that falls under the observation of Christians in a more ordinary way, with respect to the Church's state and crisis. Alas! where are now those sincere fearers of God with whom the secret of the Lord is? Or where are they to be found, that, in this respect, understand what that promised fruit of the Spirit is, amongst others, to have thereby *things to come discovered?* Nay, so far is it from this, that even *when the Lord's hand is lifted up, we will not see nor regard it.* And yet we want not *intimations* this day of what is like to fall out; at least, we have sufficient indications of our present state and circumstances; from whence we may soberly, rationally infer, by way of *moral prognostication*, what is most probable to fall out, as the event and issue of those things which are at this

time on the wheel. Though, I confess, we ought in such *inquiries* to stand upon our guard, that, under the specious design of a rational and Christian *pre-consideration* of, and *provision* for future things, we harbour not a sinful, anxious, and over-curious *thoughtfulness* about, and *scrutiny* into, those things which God sees fit to veil from us, and reserves only to himself. And therefore all *positiveness* and *dogmaticalness*, as to things so dark and debateable as future events are, is studiously to be avoided on such occasions. Though I may justly affirm it, that it is neither weakness, or a design this way to get a name in the world, that occasions men for the most part to be so confident of their having drawn *prophetical truth* out of its dark *recesses*, and of vending that way *human glosses* for the *Divine oracles*.

For my own part, I am so conscious of my own insufficiency, as to the making a judgment even of the more easy and obvious *indications* and *criteria* of our circumstances this way, that I have long hung in suspence in my own mind, whether I had best to adventure upon any *reflections* of this nature: it seemed to me, to be properly the work a *Paul*, wrapped up to the third heavens in *visions* and *revelations*; or of a *John*, who leans on his Master's bosom, to have the *secret key* of the *closet of future events*, and to unriddle the same to others: I thought days should speak, and the multitude of years should teach wisdom; and that though God was not tied to such *methods*, (since even *young men* sometimes *may see visions*, when *old men do but dream dreams*) yet who am I that I should pretend to any thing of this kind?

Yet, on the other hand, I considered, that it was *part of my office*, as a minister, humbly to enquire into the meaning of providences; that it was one of our *Saviour's charges* against the *Pharisees*, that they *neglected the observation of the signs of the time*; that there were *peculiar duties* incumbent on *Christians*, with respect to the present state of affairs, which

which could not be known, and therefore not practised, unless after an impartial *enquiry* into things; that this work of observing and judging of present dispensations, with respect to what may be inferred thence, was attended with *pleasure* as well as *pains*, and was both *commanded* and *commended* to us in scripture as a duty; and that withal, it was one part of the improvement of our reason, which as it distinguisheth us from brutes, in its being capable to *reflect back on things past*, so it was capacitated to *look forward also to those things, which we may infer are likely to fall out, from the concatenation of causes and effects*. Besides all which, the various occasions which we had lately, by the pious order of our superiors, for *fasting* and *prayer*, did superadd another argument for a *serious enquiry* into the *sins* we were guilty of, and the *nature and tendency* of those *providences* which gave birth to those *solemn opportunities*.

And as for the *weakness* I was conscious of in myself, and the *mistakes* I might thereby be incident unto in such an *undertaking*, I was encouraged notwithstanding to go on this way, from the *sense of duty*, in an humble *dependence* on God; and the rather, because I perceived, that most men that had applied themselves to such studies, had either erred by building on *mistaken grounds*, or been *too positive* in their *determinations* of particular events: whereas, I firmly resolved to guard against all occasions, of being *positive* at all in such things, or of taking *probabilities* for *certainties*. My work and design which I proposed, was therefore this only: that having considered the *present state* of affairs in these *nations*, not so much *politically* as *Christianly*, and thence inferring what seems to be most rationally to be expected, we might be brought to see and mind the *duties* which seem to be now incumbent upon us, with respect to the *continuance* of our present *happy settlement*, the *further increase* of our *mercies*, and the *averting* of those *evils* which we seem to have reason

otherwise to fear. And in order to my proceeding in this design with the greater security, as well as *perspicuity*, I purposely resolved to wave the dark *prophecies* of scripture, which I foresaw would involve me in long *debates*, and to proceed upon more certain and easy *grounds*: not that I think there can be any such sure and certain *foundation*, for making a judgment of future events, as that would be, if rightly understood; but that it is not so certain or easy to attain to know what is the real sense and design of the Spirit of God in these. But however, surely it is a work by itself, which I chused to pass by for the present; as leaving it to the *riper judgments* of others, and my own more mature and further thoughts, if I shall afterwards have occasion to bend my studies that way.

But to return: The preceding reasons, I say, did so far move me, as that I was resolved to attempt something of this nature, at least for my own satisfaction; which whilst I was musing on, and considering with myself what *portion* of scripture I should lay down as a *foundation* to build my *succeeding enquiry* upon, I know not what *suggestion* recalled to my *memory* this *dark expression* of a *dark prophet*. But sure I am, that at my first reflecting upon it, I did but little apprehend the *scope* and *design* of it, further than that from the words *rod and sword*, and the *scope* of the *context*, I did plainly see that the words were *communatory* of some *judgment* or other upon the people of the *Jews*. But upon a further search, there seemed somewhat designed in the words, which I thought might not be *unuseful* to present to the consideration of others, and which therefore I shall proceed to enquire into, when I have previously considered the *scope* of the *context*, and the *construction and meaning* of the words.

As for the *context*, though the preceding chapters, even from chap. vi. seem to be but one continued prophecy against the *Jews* for their great sins; yet, since this chapter runs in a new strain from the former,

mer, I shall go no further back, than to the first verse; where we find the prophet gets a new commission to prophecy, which is confirmed again and again, v. 8. and 18. and so runs on to v. 28. where the prophet takes occasion to digress on a new subject. It were long and tedious to scan the several veries of the chapter, and consider every observation which might be drawn thence. And therefore I shall only observe these things following in general: (1.) That the time of this prophecy was in the reign of *Zedekiah king of Judah*, who is no doubt pointed at, v. 25.; by the designation of the *prophane Prince of Israel, whose day is said to be come*; for from the very day of *Zedekiah's* breaking his *oath* to the *king of Babylon*, is *Judah's* fatal period reckoned, 2 Kings xxiv. 20. Jer. lii. 5. (2.) That the object of this prophecy is the *land and people of the Jews*; which is the more distinctly proposed as *threefold*, v. 2. viz. *Jerusalem*, the metropolis, with the whole *country of Judea*, and the *holy places* themselves also, i. e. the temple and the synagogues: all these were to meet with a severer stroke than they had met with before under *Jechoniah*. (3.) That the nature of this prophecy is comminatory and threatening, and that in a most severe manner. For, 1. The calamity threatened is a cruel and bloody war, and captivity and slavery which are to follow upon it. This is set forth by the designation of the sword, which is the great instrument of war. But this sword is not an ordinary sword, but a desolation of a singular nature: therefore it is said to be the *Lord's sword*; v. 3, 5. as being the supreme over-ruler of the calamity; and yet it is immediately appropriated to the king of Babylon, who was to be God's executioner therein, v. 19. And as this sword is said to be *burnished*, that it may glitter and look terrible; and *sharpened*, that it may make a sore slaughter, v. 9, 10, 11. So the severity thereof is further declared, when we are told, that it would *cut off both the righteous and the wicked*,

wicked, v. 3. and extend itself universally upon all flesh, from south to north, v. 4. 2. But as a farther character of the terribleness of this calamity, it is described with respect to the kinds thereof, v. 14. to be a *sword drawn the third time*. For the understanding this, we are to remember, that *two swords*, or desolating wars, had already preceded to the Jews, viz. that under Jehoiakim, 2 Kings xxiv. 1, 2,; and that under Jehoiachin, 2 Kings xxiv. 10. So that the third sword that was to follow, was that under Zedekiah, 2 Kings xxv. 1, &c. Now it is threatened, that this sword shall be doubled, i. e. be twice so severe as the preceding calamities, though possibly it may refer to the *intestine confusions* which were among the *remnant* that were left in the land under Gedeliah; which we may see Jer. xli. 2, 3, &c. This is the account which we have here of this terrible calamity; at the thoughts of which, the prophet himself is called to sigh and lament, ver. 6. But if the fore-thought of it deserved tears, what may we think would be the frame of the people when it comes. This the prophet gives us previously an account of, ver. 7. That *all hearts shall melt, and every hand be feeble*, &c. But more particularly, he represents to us the concern of the more *serious and godly part* of the Jews, in order to know the intent and meaning of this calamity; who seem therefore to be brought in here in our text, saying or thinking with themselves, *What if the sword condemn the rod?* And this leads me to consider the words themselves.

Now the plain *construction* of the words, (without giving you the trouble to hear every thing said upon them by *commentators*) seems clearly to point at these two things, as the *parts* of the *verse*: the (1.) whereof is set down by way of *reason*, to what God had commanded the *prophet* to do in the preceding *verse*, which was to *lament and howl*, by reason of the threatened *calamity*. So that if we join this *reason* to the preceding *verse*, unto which it properly

properly belongs ; the words run clearly thus : *Ery and howl, son of man, for it shall be upon my people, &c. smite therefore upon thy thigh ; because it is a trial ; i. e. eminently so, it is a trial with a witness.* Whence we may observe, by the way, *That it is very becoming a prophet to weep and lament, at the prospect of those calamities which he foresees to be coming on the world, even when, it may be, he may be sent to publish the same ;* for surely it can be no pleasant message to a minister of God, to be sent with sad and heavy tidings of judgment upon his country ; and God takes it well when he is suitably affected this way. The (2.) part of the verse consists of a *question proposed, with an answer returned thereunto.* Who it is that proposes the *question* is not expressed, though we see that the *answer* returned unto it, is from God himself. But it is a matter of no great moment by whom the question is proposed, since it is plain, that it is put up in the *name* of the *people*, those of them especially that were most seriously concerned this way ; and it seems to be inserted here of purpose, that in the answer something might be suggested, whereby God's children might be comforted, in the midst of the judgments here threatened.

It is the *second part* of the *verse* only, which I am to consider ; which, as being the *ground* of my following *enquiry*, I shall more distinctly handle.

The *question* will appear, when the *meaning* of the *words* is opened up : which I shall therefore consider with what perspicuity and brevity I can.

And, I. We may observe, that the word [*Sword*] is not in the *original*, but is *supplied* by *interpreters* to make up the *sense*. And since the *question* is relative to the *judgment* of the *sword*, threatened in the former part of the chapter, it may be positively enough inserted, though, I judge, it had been more proper notwithstanding, to have supplied the sub-understood *relation*, by the word [*Trial*] which goes immediately before, or by the particle [*It*] as relative

tive to it. And thus the verse would have run more smoothly; *For it is a trial: and what if it [or, the trial] condemn even the rod?* But the matter is not worth contending for; since, however we understood this, it leads us equally to the consideration of war and desolation, as imported therein.

II. We may consider also the *meaning* of the word [*Rod*,] which is variously taken, **מַלְךָ** being sometimes rendered the *tribe*, and sometimes the *Rod*. The *Septuagint* takes it in the first sense; but most interpreters render it as our version doth: I incline rather to this latter opinion, especially if the *observation* of *Junius* hold; who says, that it ought to be rendered [*Rod*] here, because the word is *feminine quo in genere*, (says he) *vocem tribus apud Hebraeos legere non meminimus*. But if it be taken in the first sense, yet the *meaning* will not differ much, as we shall see immediately; yet, as I said just now, I incline rather to the interpretation given in our version; especially since in the tenth verse of this same chapter, the word is found also, which cannot well be otherwise understood than by the *Rod*, to make sense of it. Where, by the way, that dark place, (which interpreters call *Mira Verba*) were, in my opinion, better rendered thus:— *It is the Rod of my Son contemning every tree.* Where by the *Rod of God's Son*, we may either understand the *Rod* wherewith God corrected *bis filii Israel*; or that it was the *Rod of Christ the Son of God*, whereby he would punish the contemners of his word. But to return: however, we understand the word, it is plain to me, that afflictions are either plainly expressed, or tacitly understood here.

Now, III. Let us consider what we are to understand by the word [*contemn*] here. It is certainly a *figurative way of speaking*, importing the greatness of the calamity threatened; which should be such as to make all *foregoing troubles* in a manner *slighted, contemned, or forgotten*; as exceeding former tribulations, as far as the *blow of a sword* doth the *lash of*

of a *rod*. And thus certainly it was, as to the judgement and captivity under Zedekiah; which did exceed the troubles under the former kings, as far as the *Sword* exceeds the *Rod*, or *destructive judgments* exceed *cautigations* and *paternal corrections*: so that though the *expression* be *active* yet the *meaning* is to be understood *passively* thus: when we read, *What if the Sword contemn the Rod?* We are to understand it, *What if the Sword make the Rod contemned?* But though this be here imported, yet it is certainly short of the purport of the *question*, as will appear from the *answer*, when we come to it: for the *answer* being *negative*, importing, *That the thing enquired after shall not be*: hence it is plain, that the *enquiry* is not barely this, *Whether the judgment threatened would be very dreadful above former judgments?* For if this had been all, the preceding threatenings are so plain this way, that the *answer* returned would certainly have been affirmative, and not *negative*: therefore, I say, it is plain, that the *question* runs upon quite another ground; and what else can this be, but a *suspicious and fearful apprehension*, *lest the design of this judgment might possibly be, totally to eradicate, cut off, and destroy the church and nation of the Jews.* It was this which God did foresee would natively arise in the thoughts of serious, concerned, and public-spirited men: and therefore it was this foreseen *objection*, which God was resolved to answer, to the comfort of his own.

From all which it will appear, that the *sense* of the *question* is this: what if this *trial* or *sword*, despise and contemn to be esteemed only as a *Rod* or *chastisement*, but be indeed a *vindictive judgement*, designed totally to destroy this church and people. As if God's children should say: *Well, since we have not been reclaimed by more gentle methods, whilst under the Rod of a displeased Father, may we not justly now apprehend, that he has cast by the Rod, and resolves to take up the Sword, that so justice and vengeance may have its free course, to the extirpating such a wicked*

n wicked generation as we are: may not God thus laugh at our calamity, and his terrible judgments condemn former chastisements, as poor weak remedies. This is what I apprehend to be the true and native meaning of this question.

And even the *Septuagint* itself, though it differ from me as to the meaning of the word *Shebet*, yet agrees upon the matter itself: for thus that version renders the question here, Καὶ τί οὐ οὐλὴ ἀπωσθῆ; *Et quid si etiam tribus repulsa fuerit?* And what if the tribe be rejected? The meaning of which I take to be as much as if it were said: What if the tribe of *Judah* be cast off also, as well as the *other tribes of Israel*? For surely, I cannot imagine, that their meaning should only be, what if the tribe should be defeated, and get the worst of it, and the enemy prevail against them? I say, this can never be rationally thought to be designed here, since it were a contradiction to the plain history of the siege and destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Affyrians*; wherein we see how far the tribe of *Judah* was prevailed over. Therefore, as this cannot possibly be the thing so positively denied in the *answer*, so neither can it be the meaning of the *question*: and therefore the *Septuagint* version seems to understand the question to import, a fear and suspicion in the mind of the *godly*, lest God might intend, by this threatened judgement, to make an end of the tribe of *Judah* and *Benjamin*, by rejecting it, in the same manner as he had done the other *ten tribes*. So that we see, whether we understand by the word *Shebet*, the *tribe*, or the *Rod*, we must of necessity understand the sum and substance of the question to be the same that I proposed but just now.

And since we have thus arrived at the true sense of the question proposed, we need not hesitate long as to the meaning of the *answer*, which is returned thereunto; for this is nothing else, but a *peremptory and absolute negation* of the thing enquired after,

viz. That the judgment feared, shall not be what many may fear it is.

Our *translators* do strangely perplex and confound the *text* here, by making this a *comparative negation* only, by the addition of two words [*no more*] which are neither in the *original*, nor *Septuagint*, the *Hebrew* being only, **לֹא יִזְהַר**, and the *Septuagint* **εὐτε οὐσία**, which is plainly this, [*It shall not be.*] Upon what reason our *interpreters* have added these words, I shall not determine: but surely what we have said, as to the meaning of the question, makes it altogether impossible that this can be the sense of the answer.

And therefore the whole seems to me to run thus: but now, when mention is made of so severe a trial, what shall we think of it? What if this *judgment* exceeds the bounds of a *Rod* or *Chastisement*? Or what if it destroy the *tribe* totally? No, no, (*says God*) it shall not be so neither: for however severe this *judgment* be, it is only designed as a *chastisement*, and not utterly to destroy. Now this doth dilucidly appear, in the *captivity* under *Zedekiah*: which though it was so severe a trial, and so furbished a sword, as might justly make all to think, that this sword or trial did *contemn the Rod*, or was intended to cut off the *tribe*: yet we see, notwithstanding, that it was only designed by God as a *correction*, which was not to make a full end of them, as the *preservation* of the *Jews* under it, and his *returning* them again from it, do clearly evince. So that this *query* and *answer* come in here, by a kind of *parenthesis*, in the midst of all this *communatory sermon*, as a *ray* of light, hope, and comfort, to the true mourners and weepers in *Zion*.

And now, I suppose, by this time, we have begun to perceive, (as I would humbly hope) the *native sense* and meaning of the *words*: and therefore we may adventure to proceed, to propose two *observations*, that I think naturally result from the *text* thus understood; the *first* from the *question* proposed;

and the other from the *answer* returned thereupon to: not to mention other things that might be drawn from *context* and *connection* of the words, to avoid prolixity. The two main and principal *observations* or *doctrines* then, are as follow, in their order; though the first, which immediately follows, is that which I design chiefly to insist upon.

OBSERVATION I.

That when GOD threatens his Church and People with the Sword of an enemy, after the Rods with which he had formerly chastened them, it may justly put the thoughts of all serious Christians to this sad and concerning Dilemma, Whether GOD may not be about to change his Chastisements into Destructive Judgments, to consume and destroy them?

I Suppose it were needless to attempt any proof of this *proposition*, since we may easily see upon the first view of the words, that whenever *any people* become thus stated and circumstantiated, as the *Jews* then were, they will have the same thoughts and concern as they appear to have had from this question: for let us but suppose our souls in their souls stead, and we will see this *inference* to flow very natively hence. Were we, with them, subdued by *foreigners*, the *half* of our *nation* *captivated and banished*, and the rest made *slaves and tributaries*; and let us see withal, *deformation* instead of *Reformation* amongst the *remnant*; together with a proud obstinate persisting in our unreformed state, contrary to all engagements, and without any rational prospect of purchasing any thing thereby but *ruin*: I say, let us but suppose this to be our case, and can we think any other thing than

than what is here insinuated, that surely God were about to turn his *rods* into *scorpions*, his fatherly corrections into the desolating strokes of an enemy. So that we see, it is not without reason, that the more serious and thinking Jews cry out, in the *query* of the text, *what if the Sword contemn even the Rod?*

Surely then, such circumstances as these, would move us to apply to ourselves more particularly, what in the general we have *observed* from the words. And therefore, since our circumstances at this time bear no small analogy to the state of the Jews at that time, may we not bring the *proposition*, a *These ad Hypothesin*, to speak more home to ourselves; thus:

That since God in his providence doth now threaten his Church and people in these nations (as well as elsewhere) with the Sword of an enemy, after the Rods, with which he formerly corrected them; it may justly put our thoughts to this sad and concerning dilemma, whether God may not be about to change his chastisements into destructive judgments, to consume and destroy us?

In the *prosecution* of this *proposition*, (wherein all the *Christian world* in general, and *these nations* in particular, are nearly concerned) I shall confine myself to these *three things*, the *last* whereof, as the *conclusion*, inferred from the *two former* as the *premises*, will necessarily require the largest elucidation. The points are these:

- I. *That we have been lately under the Rod; i. e. under God's Fatherly chastisements.*
- II. *That we are now threatened with the Sword; i. e. with severer judgments than we have yet seen.*
- III. *That the Church is upon this account reduced to this sad Dilemma; What if the Sword contemn even the Rod?*

temm the Rod ? i. e. *What if succeeding troubles and judgments be such, as shall make the former in a manner forgotten?*

The first of these is, that we have been lately under the Rod.

I suppose it needless to insist on this, by recounting the *afflictions* we have of late times been under; the memories of most men being more retentive of calamities, sorrows, and troubles, than of mercies, deliverances and comforts. The late *civil*, or rather *uncivil wars*, with the devastations and miseries thence ensuing; the severe *enacting*, and more severe *executing*, of *penal laws* on *dissenting Protestants*; the *excommunications*, and *inquisition-like* proceedings of *ecclesiastical courts*, with many other things a-kin to these: such things, I say, leave impressions on mens spirits, that are not easily worn off. And it is, I fear, the too common sin of *some* on the one side, to think upon their being actors formerly in such things with no little pleasure: as, I fear also, that *some* reflect upon their former sufferings with too great rancour and grudge of spirit, against those who were either the authors or instruments of their being so used. And as we remember, I fear, too much what we have suffered one from another; so, I suppose, the *designs* and *endeavours* of our *common enemies* are not wholly out of mind.

What ! can we have forgotten the *Popish plots* so oft renewed, and so oft discovered? or the *arbitrary designs* of *some* to enslave us, with the progresfs they made therein, in corrupting the *elections for parliament*, and the procuring the delivering up of the *charters of corporations*; together with the *illegal trials*, and *bloody executions* and *murders* of many, and *some* of them the *patriots* and *champions* of their *religion and country*? And, I suppose also, the *judgements and afflictions* which bore the immediate *signature* of *divine Providence*, cannot be obliterated out of mens minds; such as the *burning of London*, (whatever

(whatever hand some men had therein) and the sword of God, the *pestilence*, once and again renewed; with other things of that nature. I say, we cannot have lost the ideas and remembrance of those several sorts of *Rods*, wherewith God was pleased successively to correct us in *these nations* for our iniquities.

But that which I would have considered with respect to all these is, that, notwithstanding the seeming severity of them, they are yet to be reflected upon only as fatherly corrections, which God was pleased to inflict upon us, in order to reclaim us from the evil of our ways, and therefore may be observed to be tempered with mercy and favour for us: which will appear, whether we consider our former afflictions *in themselves*, or *comparatively* with those of others.

If we consider our afflictions *absolutely and in themselves*, we may find a great deal of mercy at the bottom of the most bitter cups we have yet been made to drink of: For have not our troubles been remarkably *moderated*, so as neither to come to the height which enemies designed, or which we feared? Have we not experienced God's kindness to us, even when we seemed to be plunged in the depths of *sorrow*, and the confines of *despair*? How wonderfully did God then support his people, and sweeten to them his most bitter cups? Yea, and of what *short continuance* have their most dark nights been? How hath God made the *dark clouds* pass over us! Thus was God pleased to change his dispensations, so as to shew his *fatherly displeasure*, and his *bowels of compassion* alternately: *calms* did follow our *storms*; and though *sorrow* oft continued for a *night*, yet *joy* still succeeded in the *morning*.

But further, it will appear how favourably God has dealt with us all along, in the midst of the sharpest *Rods* we have been under, if we compare our afflictions with what others have been exposed to. for have we been exposed to any thing like the *ol-*

persecutions of the primitive *Christians*? There have been but few (in comparison of the many who have been spared) who have been called to *resist unto blood*. We have not been burned alive, or fawn asunder, or dismembered piece-meal, or murdered, or massacred in our houses or beds. We have not met with such severe treatment as the poor *Waldenses* and *Piccards* of old. *Smithfield* has not again, in our days, smoked, as of old, with the faggots of *martyrs*, nor the *Marian persecution* been re-acted; neither have we fallen under such strokes as the *Parisian* and *Irish massacres*. Nay, is it not an inexpressible mercy to us, that our *country* has not been made the *field of action* to desolating armies, as Hungary, Flanders, the Palatinate and Savoy have been? We have not been made the *theatre* of desolation, or the *stages* of blood and rapine. We have not been murdered and ruined, banished and dispersed, like the poor *Piemontois* of late. Neither have we been forced to submit our *reasons and consciences* to the *unanswerable arguments* of *booted apostles*, and *Catholic French dragoons*; nor exposed to the intolerable slavery of the *most Christian Mediterranean galley's*, &c. And surely, if, besides all this, we compare what we have met with, and been under, with our fins and their aggravations, (which have not been less, but, it may be, more than of other nations) we must needs be enforced to own, That God hath dealt with us far more mildly and mercifully than our iniquities have deserved.

And as by all these things it doth plainly appear, that we have been hitherto only under the *chastisements* of a *Father*: So this is more fully and conspicuously manifested to all the world in the late *wonderful Revolution* of affairs; for in this, as God's mercy hath eminently shewed itself for the good of the *Protestant Church and interest* in general; so, more particularly, for the *safety and establishment* of *these nations*.

For what else was the language of the *late happy deliverance*

deliverance, but what God of old expressed to the Israelites, when he said, “ How shall I give thee up, “ Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, O Israel? “ How shall I make thee as Admah? ” &c.

Thus, I say, it was, that God seemed to speak to us of late, ‘ How shall I give thee up, O my Church! ‘ How shall I deliver thee to judgment and ruin? ‘ How shall I make thee as France or Hungary? &c. ‘ my bowels and heart are turned yet once again towards you: Therefore I will not at this time execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not destroy Britain; for I am GOD and not man, and ‘ therefore I will find out a way of deliverance for ‘ you,’ &c.

But suffer me yet to be more particular in the applying to ourselves *some scriptures* that seem remarkably to *quadrate* with the state of *these three nations*, at the time of this *deliverance*.

And first, did not God speak of *England* then after this manner: “ I hid me, and was wroth, and he “ went on frowardly in the way of his heart; I have “ seen his ways and will heal them.” A wonderful thing, that when God could bring no arguments from us, he should bring them from the greatness of his own mercy! But yet, notwithstanding this surprisal of mercy, many among us make quite a contrary use of it, by their restless endeavours to make themselves and others miserable again; and therefore that which follows, may fitly be applied to them: “ But “ the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it can- “ not rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” But as they love not peace, so God has said, “ That there “ is no peace to the wicked.”

In the *next* place: *Scotland's* case at that time, seemed much like that which we have mentioned of *Israel*, with respect to the captivity: “ Therefore “ (saith God) behold I will allure her, and bring “ her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to “ her.” For it was with their greatest affliction there, that God did make their greatest salvation and

and consolation to coincide. When God surprized them "with terrible things which they looked not for, he made the mountains, even then, to flow down at his presence, and turned again their captivity as streams in the south: Even since the time "that he spoke against them, he did earnestly remember them still;" and made the time of their greatest extremity his opportunity.

And then *lastly*, the dispensations of God towards *Ireland*, seem to quadrate very remarkably, with that word wherewith the Lord did of old both threaten and comfort *Egypt* in the same breath, when he says, "That he would smite Egypt, that he would "smite it and heal it," &c. The severe and bloody strokes of poor *Ireland* have been in order to its cure. And therefore we may see how far "God's "ways are above our ways, and his thoughts above "our thoughts."

So that, in all these respects, God has manifested both his power and mercy towards these nations, in the *late deliverance*. So that we may not unfitly apply to ourselves, in this respect, what was said of the *Israelites*, under a like dispensation:—"According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, what hath God wrought!"

But to proceed.

The second point is: *That we are now threatened with the sword.*

This is, I suppose, what is self-evident; for the *proof* whereof nothing is required further, than to take notice of *public occurrences*, which every *post* furnisheth us with. And that this did supervene upon the *Rods*, which we were lately under, I suppose none can doubt of, who reflects so far back as unto the *turn of affairs* in our late glorious *deliverance*: for as God delivered us then from the *evils* we groaned under, and from the *apprehensions* of worse things intended: so it was by the *unsheathing* of the sword, that it was effected, though God in mercy made the *fight*, rather than the *blow* thereof,

fave

save us. But who knows not, that the *blow* hath been since that time felt.

And surely, the sword is so far from being put up, that we see ourselves daily threatened with it from abroad; there being, at the same time, but too many ill-affected men in the midst of us, who are ready to sacrifice their *religion* and *country*, to their own bigotry, malice, and peevish humours.

That therefore, which I would only propose here to the serious reflections of all, is to consider, *what, and how terrible the Sword is*, with which we are now threatened; that we may hence see, how miserable a people we should become, if ever (which God forbid) we should be so unhappy as to fall under such a judgment. And though all considering men, I suppose, are fully enough satisfied in this matter: yet, since some seem to be altogether indifferent and regardless in the case, and others fond of ruin and misery, I shall therefore earnestly desire, that we may seriously consider what those things are, that we must necessarily expect, if God should be provoked to give us up into our enemies hands.

For surely, if God should permit this, we must expect that our *punishment* must bear some *proportion* to our many and great sins and provocations; since hereby it would be apparent, that we have very highly provoked God to inflict upon us, what he seemed, by his former dispensations, desirous to deliver us from: “For at what time God speaks concerning a nation, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in his sight, that it obey not his voice, then will he repent of the good wherewith he said he would benefit them.” Jer. xviii. 9, 10.

But if this *consideration* be apt to be slighted by *sensual* and carnal men, I desire they may but consider the *genius and complexion of our enemies*: for as they are the *enemies* of our *religion*, which they are obliged by their principles, *siis et modis*, every manner of way to root out and extirpate, under the notion of the pestilent *Northern Heresy*; so, are they not

for

sworn enemies to our country and persons, whose old grudges against us, are now heightened more and more by late provocations?

And surely, we cannot but look upon them as a *merciless and cruel enemy*, who are sufficiently known of late, by their barbarities and devastations, wherever they get footing. To whom I may not unsafely apply (what was said of another sort of enemies of old), “A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness: yea, and nothing shall escape them,” &c. *Joel ii. 3.* And though they may now cunningly play the *angler*, in fishing some with the enticing *bait* of smooth *promises*, and others with a *golden book*, yet I hope wise men will remember the old saying — *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*; as remembering that — *Fistula dulce canit volucrem dum decipit amceps.*

For we must be so far just to them, as to add this also to their character, that they are a powerful *enemy*, both for *policy, number, experience, and boldness*: and therefore our slighting of them so much, and speaking of them usually with so much contempt, I look upon as *none of the best signs of our success*. For, though every man ought to rejoice to see any sign of true courage in the nation, yet it is neither a wise nor honourable part, to *despise an enemy*, especially one so considerable as the *French* now are.

And since the case is thus with us, let us consider impartially what we have to expect, if such a terrible Sword as this should ever get a commission to be our punishment; for we may easily then imagine that no *faith* would be kept with such *heretics* as they reckon us to be. Yea, this *foreign sword* would quickly be followed with *intestine divisions*, tumults, and confusions among ourselves. And how dreadful the effects and consequences of such things must be, we may easily imagine. We should then see our *cities* and *towns* in flames, all *bonds*, civil or religious,

ligious, broken, and *liberty* and *property* wholly: t
an end. No respect then shown to the *infant* in the
cradle, or the *grey hairs* of the *aged*. We might
then see our *matrons* abused, and our *virgins* de-
floured. For *strangers* and *foreigners* would then
possess our *houses*, enjoy our *estates*, feast on the fat-
ness of our *tables*, and look big in our *apparel*;
whilst we ourselves are glad to enjoy a few *morsels*,
and esteem it a favour to be permitted to *live*. No-
thing then heard, in *city* or *country*, but *lamentation*,
misery and *woe*. No security from *murders* and *assas-
inations*, nor any peace to him that goes out or
comes in. And if it fare thus with our *outward
man*, what becomes of the *inward*? Why, it is in
bondage, darkness, and fetters. Nothing then heard
but an universal cry, *great is Diana*, and the *image*
which the *prince* has set up to be worshipped. If
there be any *Nicodemus* then, he comes to *Christ* by
night, and owns him by stealth, for fear of the *Jews*.
But if, with *Daniel*, any be so bold, as to open his
windows towards the *temple* of *Jerusalem*, he must
expect to be cast unto the enraged *lions*, and a *fiery
furnace* must then be expected to be the lot of such
as openly refuse to worship the *abomination* that *ma-
keth desolate*, which is then set up. Ah, *miserable
England*! ah, *desolate Scotland*! ah, *wretched Ire-
land*! should such things happen. And yet such
things must needs be expected, should the enemy
prevail over us. Which, since it is thus, by what
name can we call *that more than irrational, and worse
than wicked temper of many*, who seem fond of such
a scene of affairs? not remembering, that even they
themselves must suffer as well as others, if ever such
things should happen: for even those who *love such
treason*, and subserve themselves of it, will notwithstanding *bate the traitors* for it. But I shall forbear
to say any more on this head, when I have once de-
sired, that men would seriously consider these things
mentioned.

Unto which, I shall subjoin the *character* which
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the *Chaldeans* get in scripture, (wherewith I think that of the *French nation*, as *Popish*, doth in many things very aptly quadrate) whom the prophet *Habakkuk* doth describe as follows :

“ I will work a work in your days, which you “ will not believe, though it be told you. For lo, I “ raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty na- “ tion, who shall march through the breadth of the “ land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. “ They are terrible and dreadful,—their horses shall “ be swifter than the leopards,—they shall come all “ for violence,” &c. *Hab. i. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.* Aver-
tat bonus Deus quod verentur quidam *presagium* ;
mutato scilicet nomine fabulam narrari. Ut cunque,
capiat ad fructum, qui capere potest.

The third point is, that the church (upon the fore-mentioned account) is reduced to this sad dilemma, *What if the Sword contemn the Rod?* i. e. What if succeeding troubles and judgments be such, as shall make the former in a manner forgotten?

In speaking to this weighty, but critical point, I propose to myself an impartial enquiry into, or consideration of these three heads following, *viz.*

1st, *Whence it is, that we are reduced to such a condition, as to be much in the dark, whether the Sword may contemn the Rod; or what is the cause or original of this our present Dilemma.*

2dly, *What are the grounds of a rational enquiry into what is like to be; or from what topics may we adventure to consider our present state, and the tendency of things among us.*

3dly, *What is the estimate that we may adventure to make, from these grounds, of our present state; and what prognostication may we thence humbly infer, as to our future condition.*

The First of these is : *What is the cause or original of our present Dilemma, or whence it is that we are reduced to such a condition, as to be much in the dark whether the Sword may condemn the Rod?*

I have already manifested what our present *Dilemma* is, by shewing, that as we have been formerly under the Rod, so we are now threatened with the Sword. But in the prosecution of this *proposition* here, I would have it considered, (lest I appear to any *actum agere*) that I am upon a *new enquiry*, viz. *into the cause or original of this Dilemma that we are under*: The elucidation whereof will more fully open to us the thing that we are now in quest of, and which we intend to consider further, in the prosecution of the other remaining *propositions*.

And here certainly the *original and cause* of our *present dilemma* can be nothing else, but the darkness that is, or appears to us to be, upon our *present national and church-state*, with respect to God's judgements, either really impending over us, or appearing so to do. For here the minds of good men differ vastly; *some being afraid of a final rejection of us, and that God's threatenings against us are absolute and decretory*: whilst others, though they fear the judgements *impending will be very severe, if inflicted*, do yet apprehend and hope, that they shall not be such as to make a *full end of us, and that the threatenings themselves are only conditional, and not absolute*.

But in order to our more distinct cognoscing of our *present state*, as to this matter, we must necessarily *premise* some things, with respect to *God's judgments, against sinful churches and nations in general*.

And as to this we may take notice, (1.) Of a *great variation in the things which are threatened by God against such a people*. For, 1. *Sometimes he threatens totally to desert a nation or church, by removing the gospel wholly from them*; as we see plainly in the instance of the *church of the Jews this day*,

day, whose candlestick hath now for many ages been removed out of its place.

But, 2. *At other times God only threatens to cast off a people for some set and limited time, viz. for one or more generations, (yet reserving a remnant for himself); thus he did with the church of the Jews in the wilderness, he cast off one generation and yet established his covenant with another.*

And thus also he did with the Jewish church, in the time of the captivity, whom he cast off as to their national church-state for seventy years.

And (2.) As there is a great difference in the things, threatened against such a people, so is there a great difference in the manner or way of God's threatenings against sinful churches and nations. For 1. Sometimes God's threatenings are absolute and decretory; which therefore cannot be diverted or avoided, and may then be rather looked upon as open declarations of God's purpose and decree than bare threatenings. And these also are two-fold, viz. Either, 1. So absolute and decretory, as to be accompanied with judicial induction, or infatuation; so as the people who are the objects thereof, are rendered thus incapable of reformation and repentance, having first provoked God by their obstinate wickedness so to do. Thus it was with the old world, whom God repented to have made; and said (i. e. firmly determined) he would destroy. And thus it was with the Jews in and after the days of our Saviour, over whom therefore Christ laments, because they did not know in their day of grace, the things that did belong to their peace. Or, 2. Such threatenings are only absolute in part, so as still to admit of repentance and reformation, through the intervention of which, though judgments cannot be wholly averted, yet they may be mitigated, and delayed, and sanctified, and after God's set time removed. Thus it was with the Jews, as to the threatened captivity: which, though it could not be totally averted, yet we see many mitigations attending it: For it was delayed all the days of Josiah, upon his reformation.

It was not *total*; for God reserved a *remnant*. Neither was it *final*, as we see in the *return* of the people again from it. And we find also, that this *sharp Rod, or Sword* rather, was *sanctified* to this people, in purging them more from *idolatry* ever after, than they had been before. So that though this judgement could not be totally averted; yet, upon *repentance* and *reformation*, it was variously mitigated and sweetened. But,

2. At *other times*, God's *threatenings* are not *absolute*, but *conditional only*: so that though such Rods be justly deserved, yet through the intervention of *repentance* and *reformation*, they may be wholly averted and kept off. Such threatenings are ordinary in scripture; and various instances we have also of deliverance from the execution of them, through the intervention of *repentance*. Amongst these, the instance of *Nineveh* is famous; and so much the more, that it was a heathenish people. And here we may observe, that such threatenings are nothing else, but an account and open declaration of God's ordinary course, rule, and way of justice, as he is the Sovereign Rector and Judge of the world, by which he warns men of judgments to be inflicted, in case they repent and reform not. And hence it is, that *Abraham*, in his plea for *Sodom*, useth this argument: What, says he, "wilt thou destroy the righteous "with the wicked? Shall not the Judge of all the "earth do right?" Gen. xviii. 25. And if God's threatenings be thus to be understood, with respect to the world in general, then far more with reference to his own churches.

These things being premised, the great enquiry now will be, how we are to judge of our own state here: For it is the difficulty of applying these to our present state, that occasioneth our present darkness, as to that prospect we would otherwise have of things of this nature. I confess the task is difficult; yet I shall adventure to set down my thoughts of this matter, in the following *propositions*:

P R O P. I.

Our present Dilemma flows not hence, That God seems to threaten us with total rejection.

THIS is what, I hope, I am not without some weighty *Reasons* for; though I know there are some good men, whose *fears* carry them to the contrary persuasion. The *grounds* of this my *hope*, are as follow, which I leave to the impartial consideration of all; though, in a matter of this nature, we are not to expect demonstration, the subject not admitting it. But, I say, the following considerations will at least beget in us good hopes this way.

1. Let it be considered, then, That whatever *evil* be in our present state, yet we are on the *side of truth*, and have espoused a good cause. The *cause of God*, and the credit of the gospel, is that which we now contend for: And therefore, have we not reason to hope for a good event at last, though we may meet with troubles in the mean time for our *sins*?

2. And as we are contending for truth, so we are sure our enemies are fighting against it, and so may justly be looked upon as fighting against God. And therefore, however God may deal with us for a time, in making them a scourge to us; yet, in the close, we may expect, he will burn the Rod, when he has subserved himself of it. And in this possibly, the war between *Benjamin* and the *other tribes*, may be no unsuitable *emblem* of our condition. For therein we find the *Benjamites* twice victorious over the *Israelites*, even though the other tribes consulted God, in every step of the war, and went out to battle according to his express order. But at last the scene was inverted, to the almost utter extirpation of that sinfully obstinate tribe. Thus, it may be, God may be now about to do with us, in this present war: He may punish *us and our confederates* by the *French*, and

and make them for some time victorious, to our grief, vexation, and affliction. And yet I am hopeful, that when he has performed his whole work upon mount *Zion*, HE WILL BRING DOWN THE GLORY OF THAT PROUD KING, AND LAY IT IN THE DUST, TO THE ECLIPSING OF THAT FIERY SCORCHING SUN OF THE POPISH WORLD; SO THAT HIS MOTTO, *Nec pluribus impar*, MAY COME TO BE *Etiam singulis impar* *.

3. And surely, the great things that God has done for us in these nations of late, may cherish in us good hope, that God does not threaten us with any such thing as a total rejection. He may indeed suffer *this generation*, (whom he hath so lately, as it were, brought out of *Egypt*) to fall in the wilderness, because of our sin and ingratitude, without causing us to see that desirable state of affairs, which otherwise might have been our mercy. But to think that he has done all this, and yet intends to leave both us and our posterity as a prey to the Amalekites, who can imagine? Might we not then plead with Moses, in the like case: "Lord if thou do so, the nations will say, That thou didst suffer this people to be a prey to their enemies, because thou wast not able to save them; and what wilt thou do then for thy great name?" Therefore, I choose in this case, to conclude against such a fear as this, with the wife of Manoah, "If the Lord had designed utterly to reject us, he would not have accepted us so far as he has, neither would he have shewn us such wonders as he has of late wrought for us." Judg. xiii. 23.

Object. But what security have we against a total rejection, more than the seven famous Asiatic churches of old had, to whom John dedicates especially his *Revelation*.

Ans. I. I confess, God's dealings toward those old churches, as well as many others, have been very awful and tremendous. Yet I take it as a vulgar error only, (though so commonly asserted, e-

* See Fleeming's *Rise and fall of Papacy, or Apocalyptic key*.

ven by great divines) that *all the seven Asiatic churches* are entirely cast off; although I readily grant, that some of these churches are indeed totally for the present cast off, and all of them miserably ignorant and corrupted. But to unchurch all places overrun with error and superstition, (as all the *Grecian* churches now are) or to think, that when God has so remarkably kept up the profession of religion, in some of those places, there is, notwithstanding, no seed of grace, or spark of piety remaining in the hearts and lives of some such poor and weak Christians, is a stretch too great for Christian charity to swallow or admit of. And yet, if this were granted (which I think none can) that there is not the least grain of serious and true piety among them, we must still hopefully conclude, that God seems to intend the revival of the gospel again in those parts, in due time, where he has so wonderfully continued the Christian profession. But now, for proof of this, that Christianity is not wholly extinguished in all those *Asiatic* churches, I refer the reader to Sir *Paul Ricaut's* account of them: which I had further confirmed to me by a worthy *gentleman* who was his fellow-traveller into those parts: by which account we are given to understand, that as *Ephesus*, *Sardis*, and *Laodicea*, are totally destroyed at this time, and *Pergamus* almost reduced to the like condition; so the other three, viz. *Smyrna*, *Thyatira*, and *Philadelphia*, though involved in the same darkness and superstition with the rest of the *Grecian* churches, are yet, notwithstanding, preserved in some tolerable condition, as monuments of God's sparing mercy.

And truly, when we consider how exactly both the promises and threatenings, made to or against those churches, seem to quadrate with their present state, it seems not a little confirming to our faith.

If it were not for fear of swelling this paper, by too long a digression, I would be at some pains to shew, how remarkably the prophecy is literally fulfilled in the event; but this will be but a pleasant diversion,

diversion, to compare the *second and third chapters of the Revelation*, with the *second chapter of the fore-cited book*: and therefore I leave this hint to be further pursued by private meditation. Only, I say farther, that hereby I have received more pleasure and satisfaction, than in all the fine-spun *allegorical glosses* of some learned men, who interpret this mystically, to represent the various states of religion in the several ages of the Christian church, to the end of the world.

But 2. I say further, in answer to this objection, That the *case of the Asiatic, and other primitive churches*, that either are, or seem to be totally cast off, is *vastly different* from the *state of the reformed churches*, since the *Reformation*, in this respect; that whereas they fell in with the *increase of Antichristian defections*, we are now under the *real decrease of that interest*, whatever the present posture of things seem to be: *Those ancient churches* were ruined by that contagious and prevailing *apostacy* from the truth, which, by various steps, over-ran the Christian world, under *Papal usurpations*, and so fell also under the lash of those severe judgments which God raised up against such as worshipped the beast and his image, such as the *Saracens* and *Turks*. But, on the contrary, the flourishing of the *reformed churches* is in a time, when the *Papal power* is sensibly declined, and the *Turkish empire* exceedingly weakened: so that the *instances* brought from the defection and desertion of the primitive churches are not *parallel* to our case, neither quadrate with our state, in these and our neighbouring nations, so as to give us any just grounds of fear, as to God's casting off the reformed churches.

Object. But we are not without instances of the same sort, since the begun weakening of the *Papal interest and power*; as in the removal of the gospel from several cities in Italy, and the Spanish Netherlands; but especially in the unchurching of the famous church of Bohemia.

Answ.

Answ. Though it hath pleased God to deal thus severely with churches, sometimes by way of sovereignty, that we may see and tremble at such awful dispensations; yet the instances adduced do not prove the thing intended: for as to the recalling the gospel from some few places in *Italy*, and the *Spanish Netherlands*, the case does not quadrate almost in any thing with ours: for they had rather the gospel offered unto them, than settled among them; all its commission being (as it were) to call a few of God's secret ones out from among them: which end being effected, the gospel had done its work, and so was recalled. So that those places where the gospel did shine for a little while, (as at *Lucca*, &c. in *Italy*, and at *Antwerp*, &c. in the *Netherlands*) were never brought to any such fixed and contined church-state, as to bear a true analogy to the state of churches settled in a succession of church-officers and church-members, wherein the gospel has been handed down from generation to generation, and so become interwoven with their other properties and privileges.

But, I confess, the instance of the *church of Bohemia* is more cogent, and of more awful reflection to her sister churches. And yet I see no just ground hence, of fearing the like, as to God's churches in these nations, since God has done so much for us already, and placed us in such circumstances as we are now under, in calling us to stand up in defence of the truth, against such wicked *antichristian enemies* as we are now conflicting with. For however awful God's providence may seem to be, in unchurching that famous branch of the *Slavonic churches*, yet it is rather to be esteemed an instance of God's sovereignty, than any leading presage to other churches: for particular instances of this kind are not conclusive with respect to others. All, therefore, that can be inferred hence is, that God may, in his sovereignty (if so it please him) deal thus with other churches; which none make any question of: but that God hereby

hereby seems to forewarn other churches of the like judgment awaiting them, is what we have no rational ground to fear, that I see. So that, after all, I think the proposition I have laid down, is rational, and founded upon as sure grounds as a thing of this nature will admit of.

P R O P. II.

Our present dilemma flows not hence: That God's threatenings are absolute and decretry, so as to be followed with judicial induration.

THIS proposition is not a little confirmed from the illustration of the preceding: for since judicial induration, and hardness of heart, usually go before God's total rejecting a people: if it be proved, that God does not threaten us with total rejection, we may rationally conclude, that there is no ground to think that we are under any stroke of judicial induration this way.

But since the proof of this proposition also, may strengthen our belief of the former, (seeing where this evidence of total rejection is absent we may be satisfied, that there is no such thing designed against us) I shall therefore consider what may be confirming this way.

Now, this will appear more than probable, if we consider the many pious and praying souls, who yet remain this day, and who cease not to importune God for mercy to a sinful people. If in the case of *Sodom*, and her sister churches, God would have spared them (notwithstanding their monstrous sins and abominations) if but ten righteous persons had been found therein, then surely we have reason to hope, that the judgments threatened against us are not absolute and decretry, since we have reason to hope, *That there are at least ten thousand godly and truly religious persons, yet left among us in these nations.* For if in the days of *Elijah*, when there was

such

such an *universal defection* of *Israel* to *idolatry*, that the *prophet* thought he was the *alone survivor* of the *true prophets*, God had yet reserved to himself *seven thousand* that *had not swerved from God's institutions*: I say, if the case was thus then, surely we may rationally hope, that there are at least *double that number* still among us, who have been careful to keep themselves free from the defections and reigning evils of these times wherein we live.

And to me also it is an hopeful sign this way, to consider the piety of many young persons growing up, who may be instrumental to hand down religion to a future generation. I could indeed wish for more of this, as being sorry to see so many, on the other hand, as it were wholly given up to wickedness: but yet, as I remember of no generation so reformed, but still the old saying might take place therein, *Οι μάλισται κακοί*, *That the worst are most numerous*: so I would not wholly *despise the day of small things*; but rather hope yet, *That, as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith destroy it not, for a blessing is in it; so the Lord will be pleased to do for his servant's sake, that he may not destroy them all.*

P R O P. III.

Our present Dilemma stands in this: Whether God's threatenings of severe judgments against us, for some definite time, be absolute as to the things threatened, though admitting of mitigation and alleviation, or whether it be wholly conditional.

HAVING, in the former propositions, shewed wherein our prefent dilemma does not stand, I have adventured to shew its true rise and original in this: Therefore, having proved that it does not stand in this, — *That there are any just grounds of imagining, that we are in hazard of being totally cast off*; I say, this being manifested, it will plainly follow,

low, that the threatened judgments respect only a limited time: so that there was no need to propose this of new, or prosecute it further. And again, I hope it may appear by the second proposition, as more than probable, that our dilemma flows not from hence neither, that God's threatenings against us are so absolute and decretory, as to be followed with judicial induration upon us.

But after all this, the difficulty that remains runs between these two things, viz. Threatenings that are indeed, in the main, absolute and decretory, though yet admitting of alleviations as to the circumstances of the things threatened, upon the supposition of repentance; and threatenings that are wholly conditional, so as not only to admit of alleviations and mitigations, but capable wholly to be suspended and averted, upon the supposition of repentance and reformation.

Here stands the knot of the question; which, for my part, I dare not adventure any positive resolution of. And indeed, who is there that can do it? This being a secret reserved in the breast of the Most High, and one of those *undiscovered mysteries*, which he hath reserved to himself, and which therefore it were over-bold and curious for us to search after rashly. And though my hopes would incline me to think God's threatenings against us to be altogether conditional; and upon the other hand, the instance of the *Israelites*, mentioned by *Ezekiel*, in this his twenty-first chapter, would tend to increase my fears, yet none of these being conclusive, I dare make no positive judgment of our case and circumstances this way; but must leave it to be a dilemma, the parts whereof hang, as the two scales of a balance, in such an *equilibrium*, that it is not easy to judge, which of them does so much as seem to preponderate. However, this may possibly receive some light from what remains yet to be discoursed of: And therefore I proceed to the next head.

The second head is: What are the grounds of a rational enquiry, into what is like to be; or from what topics may we adventure to consider our present state, and the tendency of things among us, at this time.

In Answer to which, I shall endeavour impartially to consider, both what seems promising and threatening in our case. And in my enquiry into this, waiving prophetical indications, (which would lead me too far out of the way, and which I therefore leave to a discourse by itself) I shall confine myself to these two topics of argument, viz.

1. *What God's way in his providence hath been to us.* And,

2. *What our way hath been towards him.*

And 1. It is worthy our most serious reflection, to consider, what God's way hath been, and is with us, in the dispensation of his providence. Which, that we may consider impartially, we shall reflect both on what is promising and encouraging, and what is territory and of a threatening aspect.

And, (1.) We must acknowledge it to God's praise, that we are not without some encouraging symptoms, from the displays of God's mercy in the over-ruling dispensations of his providence.

To this end, may we not observe how remarkably God hath defeated the many plots and conspiracies of enemies? He hath taken the politic and wise in their own craftiness, and turned their counsels headlong, so that their hands have not been able to perform their enterprize. Our enemies have been taken in the gins and snares they laid for others; and in the pits which they digged for us, they themselves have fallen. Of which we have many, and those fresh and recent, instances.

And as God hath often turned our enemies wisdom into foolishness, so hath he often converted their strength into weakness, by breaking their forces both by sea and land. The total reduction and conquest of Ireland, the stilling the tumults and insurrections of Scotland, and the late sea victory, are so

many evidences of the Divine favour, and goodness yet towards us, as ought to draw out our hearts in grateful acknowledgments, and encourage us to hope still in our God for further receipts of mercy.

For what are all these gracious *providences*, but so many *opportunities* put into our hands, in order to our further establishment and settlement for the future: which seems not unreasonably to suggest to us, that the Lord's thoughts are yet thoughts of peace toward us.

But, (2.) Whatever upon the forementioned accounts seem promising, we cannot be so partial as not to reflect also on some things in God's present *providences*, that look with a quite different aspect.

And, in the first place, is it not frightful to consider for how long a time God hath seemed to *desert our public counsels and conduct*? Have we not been suffered hitherto to grop for our way, as it were, in the dark, and as if we were blind and had no eyes to see it; yea, and to miss it too? whilst yet in itself it is so very easy and plain, that it is a wonder we should wander so long out of it. For what is more plain, than that our *security* stands, in *encouraging and trusting the best and most faithful persons*; even such who, both from a sense of *duty and interest* itself, must needs be careful and industrious to promote the *security* and *settlement of those*, with whom they themselves are inseparably *linked*, so as to stand or fall with them: whereas the acting otherwise, as it is displeasing to God, so may indeed look like an *infatuation* from God, especially if long persevered in.

And may it not also be observed to this purpose, how unaccountably remiss we are, in *improving the occasions* that Providence puts into our hand for our own establishment? The men who seek our ruin, and have over and over attempted it, though delivered oftener than once into our hands, are, by an *unparalleled clemency* (which I pray God, may not prove fatal to us) let go, to attempt again the per-

petration of former crimes : which, as it looks like a slighting of Providence, and a secure trusting to ourselves ; so is no small discouragement to all good subjects, and more especially to those whose works and office especially calls them to be assistant and serviceable to the government this way.

And surely it is matter of sad reflection to consider this day, how remarkably the *Spirit of God is withdrawn from his ordinances*, notwithstanding our external liberty. I confess we are not without some instances this way : but alas ! these are so few and rare, that they make but an inconsiderable exception from this sad truth ; which is but too well known, though not enough bewailed by serious Christians.

I must needs also add, as matter of no small concernment, that it looks ominous to the *fabric* of our *Zion*, that God hath of late hewed down so many of our *eminent pillars*, who by their prayers and endeavours were so much assisting to the carrying on of the work of the gospel. Alas ! how many *eminent ministers*, and *useful Christians*, have of late been called off the stage, whilst *few* rise up to fill their rooms. " Thus the righteous perish, and none lay it to heart, neither consider that they are taken away from the evil that is to come."

But, 2. As there are both good and bad symptoms in our case, from the consideration of God's way towards us ; so let us reflect also impartially, on what of these is to be found in our carriage towards God.

And, (1.) As I would improve every beam of hope that I find encouraging this way ; so I cannot but with pleasure reflect upon these things following, viz.

How readily, in the first place, our *representatives in parliament*, did concur with their *Majesties*, in granting a free liberty to conscientious *dissenters* from the

the present *constitution of the church of England*, to serve God in that way which they reckon most pure and evangelical. For surely the undoing and repealing of heavy *penal laws*, on the forementioned account, was a very suitable return to the great mercies received in the wonderful deliverance which God hath wrought for us all in common a little before.

And next, it is very encouraging to consider how far *their Majesties* have already concerned themselves in the *reformation* of their people, by emitting their *declarations* for the *discountenancing and punishing vice and immorality in persons of all ranks*. This is, I confess, a hopeful sign of good to us: and we may say of it, *Blessed be the Lord God, that bath put such a thing as this in the heart of the King and Queen*: only good men could wish, that care were taken to act accordingly, by such whose office it is to see the laws in such cases more universally, and more impartially executed, for the encouragement of them that do well, and the terror of them that do ill; ‘That so judgment might be no more turned backward, nor justice stand afar off:’ for we have yet too much reason to complain, ‘that truth has fallen in the streets, and that equity doth not enter; yea that he that departeth from iniquity, maketh himself a prey.’ But yet, though our case were such, ‘that there were no man, nor any intercessor, God may, notwithstanding, work for his name sake, and his arm, in due time, bring salvation; though, in the mean time, he will undoubtedly repay his adversaries according to their deeds; that so men may learn to fear the Lord from west to east. For when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. After which we may hope, that the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from iniquities in Jacob. And then shall God’s covenant be so established with us as not to depart out of our mouth, nor out of the mouth of

‘our seed; nor out of the mouth of our seed’s seed
‘from henceforth and for ever.’

The proclaiming and observing a national monthly fast, in order to implore the *Divine presence* with, and assistance to our armies and fleets, may justly be reckoned also as a promising sign of good to us: for may we not hope, God intends further to bless us, when he stirs up our rulers, and the nation in general, thus far to own him, in imploring his favour, both as to further protection, conduct, and success: since he hath promised to honour those that honour him, and that such as seek him shall find him.

And, may I not add to all this, as a further promising sign, the happy *union* and agreement entered into by many serious ministers and Christians of different persuasions in and about London: for if *division* be a presage of ruin to a family, church, or nation, may we not hope that *union* is a sign of security and peace. Only it were to be wished, that this happy design of *union* were more universally carried on among all good men of all *denominations and persuasions*. But alas! we may sooner wish for this, than hope to see it, in this present degenerate age.

But, (2.) Whatever encouragement the fore-mentioned particulars afford us, I am led, on the other hand, to cast mine eye upon things more unpleasant and frightful, which I am afraid may seem too justly to preponderate the former considerations.

And here, being myself no politician, and not pretending to understand the reasons which sway sovereign princes and states in their more *mysterious* *actions*, I shall therefore pass by such things here, as most men are too prone rashly to judge of, and shall only reflect upon those *things* that I am sure are very sad and dreadful *symptoms* of our present state.

And, in the first place, how dreadful a thing is *Atheism* at this time, in the great advances and progress

griefs thereof, even in the midst of the light of the gospel? How universally hath this contagion spread itself amongst all ranks and degrees of men! And especially amongst those who pretend to an higher and more refined wit than others. So that those who could not swallow Popery, but saw through its impostures, have yet suffered themselves to run headlong into *this greatest of infatuations*. But if reason recoil in the breasts of some, at the thoughts of Atheism in its naked dress; yet, with a little refining, men can bring their thoughts to admit of it under the notion of *Spinozism*, or *Deism*; to the renouncing the principles of Christianity and *all revealed religion*. This indeed is like to be the condemnation of the world, that notwithstanding the glorious light of the gospel, which now shines so clearly, men do yet love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

And what shall I say of the prodigious increase of *profanity, immorality, and debauchery*, with which these nations do every where so much abound, that even Popery, yea Mahometanism and Paganism itself can scarce out-do us? And do not imagine that we have been delivered to do all these *abominations*, which we see daily committed amongst us; which are such, as we may trace them even to the church and altar.

And how sad a thing is it to observe, that *enmity to, and contempt of* all serious piety and religion, which so universally obtains in the spirits of multitudes this day, and which only wants an opportunity to put itself forth in deeds suitable to its own nature. How avowedly do many men own their contempt of all things sacred, and their hatred against all *serious persons*, and every thing that looks like the true practice of *genuine religion*! And surely, were the *generality of England* rightly touched with a true sense of God's *sacred institutions*, they could not longer endure that *horrid profanation of the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper*, whereby it

is prostituted to *carnal, secular, and selfish ends*: which is a sin that continues to cry loudly for vengeance upon the land.

But the contempt of the gospel is not only the sin of those, who openly avow their enmity against it: but may justly be laid to the door also of such who seem otherwise, in their carriage and deport, to *own and profess* the same. The *heavenly manna* rained down in such plenty, round about us, is now *loathed and nauseated* by us: *So that our table is like to become our snare*, and our blessings like to tend to our hurt.

And to all these things, I cannot but add, how sad an aspect it bears, that *damnable or dangerous errors* have of late had so formidable a growth among us; for as *gross Arminianism* hath overspread a great part of the nation, so *Socinianism* hath not lost ground, but hath insinuated itself into the minds of too many. And of late, *wild Antinomianism* hath been rampant, to the overturning the *faith*, and even *judgment* of many, which hath been so far from being discountenanced by *some*, who were most of all concerned to do it, that it hath had *too many* to blow the coal thereof, to the reproaching the zealous defenders of the truth, as if they intended to set up the *law* in the room of the *gospel*; when they were only careful to assert the being and use of both in their own places. All which things may easily discover to us, how *sad a root* it must needs be, that produces *such bitter fruits*.

And what is this else, but a *poor, blind and narrow spirit, or littleness or dwarfishness of soul*, by which all those are certainly acted, who include all *religion* within their own *inclosures*, and confine the *catholic church* to the narrow *limits of communion*, which they themselves, or their particular *founders* have set up? For whilst this temper prevails, faction and strife, conceit and pride, emulation and envy, and passion and railing, will still continue to be both the trouble and blemish of the church.

And

And to wild and erroneous principles, we may well add *wild and irregular practices*. We have church-levellers as well as state-levellers, who turn the ministry into great *contempt*, by setting up *weak, ignorant, and illiterate men*, to be teachers of others, who themselves stand in need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God. If such persons were turned back to their proper *mechanical employments*, and ordered to learn and give an account of their *catechism*, it were much better, both for the church in general, and themselves in particular. But how sad is our state and condition, if every proud and ignorant *enthusiast* set up for a *preacher*, and be magnified by a *giddy, unsettled crew of poor deluded creatures*, to be *acted by the Spirit*, because he can speak *nonsense and confusion* with as much boldness as ignorance.

These are some of the sad *symptoms* of our present state and condition: which I might run out longer upon, but that I am glad to get off so melancholy and *sid a subjet*.

To all which, I might subjoin some *considerations* of another kind, particularly that of the *late astonishing earthquake*: But finding this *providence* managed by others already, I purposelly confined myself to the *topics* I have been considering in this place. And now, after all, I leave what I have said on both sides to the impartial reflections of all serious and thinking men; not adventuring myself to determine positively on either hand, but leaving it as a *dilemma yet in terminis*: *What if the Sword contemn even the Rod?* However, I pass on to the third and last head. Now,

The third head is: *What the estimate is; that we are to make from these grounds of our present state; and what prognostication may we thence humbly infer, as to our future condition.*

In *Answer* to this: Since I have resolved not to be peremptory and dogmatical, as to future events of this nature, I shall therefore only *infer* these following

owing things, from what has been already argued, as including in them what an impartial consideration of the premises will, I think, suggest to every serious and thinking Christian, that will be at the pains to examine and apply the same.

1. Inf. *That what has been said, though it argue some good things to be still among us, yet it plainly lets us see, that these nations are full of sin.*

To shew this, were to repeat what I said but just now, under the preceding enquiry: where, though we did reckon up both what was good and bad in our case; yet the bad *symptoms* are evidently such, as may demonstrate the *inference* to be very native and conclusive. So that surely we have reason “to be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, and that are ready to die: for our works are not found perfect before God.”

2. Inf. *That our present case argues, that we are under some begun degrees of being forsaken of God.*

This also appears plainly from what was said under the preceding enquiry; which therefore it were needless to repeat here.

3. Inf. *That our present state is such, that nothing can save us, but one of these two things, viz. either a miracle of sovereign mercy, or a more than ordinary measure of repentance and reformation.*

This is, as a native conclusion from what has been said already, so also certain and undoubted in itself: For I cannot imagine, where we can find a *third way* of salvation besides these. But though this inference be in the general undeniable; yet it is a matter so weighty, that I shall dwell on it a little, in order to draw on towards a conclusion of this discourse. And in doing this I shall distinctly consider these two things, whereby only we can expect salvation.

The (1.) way of salvation is by *the sovereign and extraordinary appearance of God further for us, concerning which we may justly enquire, whether we have*

have any rationally probable grounds to expect to be thus saved.

To this I *Answer*, That as it must be in a way of sovereign mercy that we can be saved at all, if ever we be saved, taking the word in its *ordinary acceptance*: so, whether God will save us in a *wholly extraordinary way*, taking the word in a *strict and peculiar sense*, as contradistinct from the more usual method of salvation, is a thing that is not possible for any man certainly to determine, without special revelation.

Yet, since the *Question* is not if there be any *certainty this way*; but only if there be any *probable grounds to expect salvation and deliverance this way*: I shall adventure to answer it more particularly.

And truly my answer in this respect must be *negative*, since I can see no rational ground of expecting any such thing; though I am sure I shall heartily rejoice, if any man can let me see any such ground or grounds of hope. But, if our case be such, as we may hope, *in an ordinary way*, to be saved if we *repent* and thoroughly *return* to God, as we have before demonstrated, I see no reason we have to expect miracles this way.

I know it may be *objected* to this, that we have been hitherto saved by a continued series of wonders, and by signal and extraordinary appearances of God for us, which may seem as a probable ground, at least, of God's appearing for us thus still.

But I *Answer*, that though I gratefully acknowledge to God's praise, his remarkable appearances for us hitherto, yet this, to me, is so far from being an argument for our expecting the same, or the like still, that it makes me rather fear the contrary: for what was God's end in all these things, but to lead us in to himself, by a serious turning from sin to righteousness. But if all these have been so far from reaching that end, that we have rather grown worse under them, can we expect that God should deliver such

Such a base and ungrateful people still? When, therefore, I consider how dreadful our backslidings and apostacy have been, and how we have “ forsaken our “ Rock and Strength, and made lies our refuge;” what can I think else, but that God seems to be *letting us alone*, and *suffering us to walk in our own ways*, in order to convince us and the world how insufficient all creature assistances are without him; that *thus*, if possible, *we may be led back again to himself, in the way of reformation and repentance.* This is my sentiment of this matter; which yet I propose without any positiveness: For *who dare limit the Holy One of Israel, in his way and method of working*, since he often chooses to appear in ways quite cross to our thoughts, that he may shew us, that “ his “ thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as “ our ways.” However, this, I think, I may safely say, that *though God may thus work for his name’s sake*; yet we have *no rational ground to expect this.* And therefore I proceed to the other way.

Now the (2.) way of *salvation*, by which we seem to have most reason to expect a turn of affairs, is *by some more than ordinary measure of repentance and reformation.*

Concerning this weighty and momentuous point, there are these *three Questions* that may natively arise in our minds, and are worth our most serious consideration, *viz.* ‘ Why an extraordinary measure of repentance and reformation is at this time so necessary? Whether such a measure of these may be now rationally and probably expected? And what we must do in order to attain these, in order to the averting impending judgments?’

1. Quest. *Why an extraordinary measure of repentance and reformation is at this time so necessary, in order to our farther and more compleat deliverance?*

Answ. That such a measure of these is necessary, seems to me to be beyond debate, since our remedy must

must bear proportion to our *disease*. And surely our circumstances appear to be such, from what has been said, that we may easily conclude this to be necessary; for without such a serious and speedy turning to God, our case is the next step to be desperate, and we in hazard to be yet farther forsaken of our God. And I pray God, that upon our continuing to neglect our duty as to this, we fall not under that sad and irrevocable sentence which the *Jews* of old were under, *that though Job, Noah, and Daniel were to intercede for us*, their prayers would return into their own bosoms again without effect.

And do not God's providences this day eminently call for this? What else is the *voice* of God's *terrible dispensations* in righteousness against some of our *neighbour churches*? What else is the *design* and scope of all those *various providences* we ourselves *meet with*? And for what end else, does God suffer *our enemies to prevail* and increase so much as they do this day? Surely this, if any, is the use we ought to make of all these things.

2. Quest. *Whether a more than ordinary measure of repentance and reformation, may be now rationally or probably expected?*

Answ. I should be bold and presumptuous, if I should be positive here. Yet, upon the other hand, I cannot but in faithfulness speak what appears to me most probable; leaving it to serious and sober persons to judge as they see reason.

I say then, that though I know it is an easy thing with God to produce such a desirable frame on the spirits of the generality of men of all sorts, in order to the averting of impending judgments; yet the sins and impieties of the present generation are such, as to make me not a little afraid, that we are not like to see such an universal change as yet; though, I question not, many may be enabled to do this for their own particular advantage.

And

And truly, I think, I am not without ground for this my fear, when I consider that *all attempts this way* have hitherto been *in vain*, and to little or no purpose. And is not *all advice this way* still *mocked at* by the generality? so as the very *naming* it is ridiculed as *conting*, and the *thing* itself as *fanatism and enthusiasm*. And where are there any to be found, that are *acted* with any *public spirit* this way, in order to carry on so good and necessary a work, even among those *whose office* is to stir up others to such duties; the most, if not all, despairing of effectuating such an hard and seemingly impossible performance.

Besides all this, is not wickedness now come, as it were, to its *anu* and *height*, so as we may say, with reason enough, *Omne in præcipiti vitium stetit*; that wickedness is gone so far, that it can go no farther, except that it is ready to throw us headlong over the *precipice* of ruin and destruction. Our *sins* indeed seem to be ripe for the harvest, and our *cup*, if it be not already, is near full; so that there seems to be nothing left us, but a *fearful looking for of judgment*, except *speedy repentance* do unexpectedly preserve us.

Nay, have I not reason for this my fear, when the most part this day seem to be under such an *infatuation*, that they seem fond of ruin, as if they were *weary not of this, or the other government only, but of settlement itself*. These are the grounds why I am afraid we are not like to see such a desirable temper and disposition of soul. But however, I heartily pray that God, *with whom the residue of the Spirit is*, may prevent and disappoint my fears this way. And I have reason, I hope, also, to conclude, that whatever strokes we may meet with, they will be but of a short continuance as we will see by and by, when we come to the *second observation*.

3. *Quest.* *What we must do in order to attain such a measure of true repentance and reformation, as may give*

give us encouragement to hope, that God will yet avert his judgments from us?

Answe. As neither our fears nor hopes ought to be the rule of our duty; so we ought to stir up ourselves at all times to the performance of those things which God requires of us, whatever be the event.

And here therefore, besides *earnest prayers* to God for this, without which we can never expect it; we must seriously set ourselves to *walk more Christianly than we have yet done*. And, for this end, we must heartily and humbly *acknowledge our sins before God*. We mu^t make the *Scriptures the rule and directory of our actions*. We must *associate ourselves with the most wise and serious persons*. We must *trust more to God and a good cause, than to POPISH CONFEDERATES, or any other allies whatsoever*. We must lay aside *evil counsels and counsellors*, and employ good and faithful men in places of trust. *Justice* must be dispensed and executed impartially and fairly.

The *clergy* must be reformed, by purging those who are either notoriously *corrupt in doctrine*, or openly vicious and *scandalous in practice*: All such being a shame and reproach to that sacred employment. The *universities* must be regulated, and sober, ingenious, and studious persons encouraged. We must study and endeavour *union* in things wherein we are agreed, and *charity* and mutual forbearance in things wherein we differ: we ought thus to manifest our *moderation to all men*, especially the *more sober and serious persons* who differ from us, laying aside all passion, blind zeal, calumny and envy. And, in *sum*, care must be taken to *encourage virtue and punish vice*; that the government may be truly a *praise to them that do well, and a terror to them that do ill*.

Could I but once see these *things seriously minded and prosecuted in the land*, I should reckon I had

reason to be encouraged yet, as to our farther deliverance from all the attempts both of foreign and domestic enemies. And that God may be pleased to pour down such a spirit more universally upon us, shall be my constant prayer to Almighty God. But till this be, I cannot but be justly apprehensive, that some eminent judgment is now hanging over us, ready to fall down upon us: and therefore I pray God, that he may lay it upon all our hearts, to be careful to be found in the practice of our duty, whatever happen: for he that walketh uprightly walketh always most surely.

But since I only propose this as ground of fear, without asserting it peremptorily as certain, I leave it as such here, yet as a thing that deserves our most serious reflections. It is enough for me, that I have followed the *thread of the text*, and the *principal doctrine or observation* that it presents us with: I shall therefore, after all, leave it as a dilemma, *what if the Sword contemn even the Rod?* which if I have not unriddled, yet, I think, I have not obscurely illustrated: but if I have not done either, yet time will.

However, I am loath to end so abruptly, or leave the reader with such an *afflictive and melancholy idea of things*, as that which I have been last upon: and therefore I shall proceed to what may a little alleviate our sorrowful *reflections* this way: For which end I shall briefly consider a *second doctrine or observation*, which natively results from the answer to the preceding question, according to the preceding explication thereof. Which observation will serve here as a *coronis*, to what we have discoursed more largely upon the former *doctrine*.

OBSERVATION II.

That however severely GOD may threaten his Church and people, yea though he should give the Sword a commission severely to rage against them for a time: yet usually even his most severe dealings with them, exceed not the nature of a Fatherly chastisement.

I SAY here, that *usually* God's most severe dealings with his people, exceed not the nature of chastisements, because it cannot be denied, but that God, in his *sovereign disposal*, may sometimes do otherwise; yea and actually hath done otherwise: as appears in the case of many of the old famous *Asiatic and African churches*: of which we may now say, *ubi olim ecclesi, ibi nunc regnat barbaries*: That where famous churches were of old, there barbarity doth now take place.

But, to comfort ourselves against such desolating and overturning *calamities*, I shall lay down *three propositions*, which may be ground of great encouragement to us, in the midst of what otherwise looks very frightful.

P R O P. I.

GOD will not totally cast off his Church in general.

WHATEVER come of particular churches, this is certain, that God will have a church to serve him somewhere in the world: For *Christ must reign till all his enemies be made his footstool*. And we are sure, that the *Church is so established, that the gates of hell can never prevail against it*. Let Pagans and Idolaters, and all enemies whatsoever do their worst; yet it is sure they shall never be able to root

out the true fearers and seekers of God from the earth; for God will have a *seed and generation to serve him as long as the sun and moon endure*. And when Satan and his instruments have done their worst, yea supposing them to carry on their conquests as far as *Dioclesian* did of old, so as again to inscribe their *statutes and triumphal arches*, with *Delecto penitus Christianorum nomine*: Yet, after all, this *seed* will encrease and spring forth again, and the *Stone cut out of the rock without hands*, will in the end totally break and destroy all the powers and potentates that oppose it.

P R O P. II.

That whatever troubles the Church of God may meet with for a time, yet there is a more flourishing and prosperous state yet promised to it.

SURELY it is a mighty forcing of scripture, to interpret all the great and august prophecies of scripture, concerning the glory of the *last times*, of what has already passed over the Church: For when can we find, in *any history*, such a flourishing state of the Church as can without contention be reckoned the fulfilling of what the *inspired prophets have foretold us*? and must all their great and glorious descriptions of this succeeding state of the Church, pass for mere *Hyperboles, or Metaphors*? No, certainly: They give us to understand, that the *Stone cut out of the rock without hands*, will yet further encrease and fill the world; and that the *mountain of the Lord's house* will be so established above the tops of all other mountains, that all the nations will flock unto it; so that the kings of the earth will reckon it their greatest honour, to bring their glory into the *New Jerusalem*, for its establishment, security, and peace.

P R O P.

P R O P. III.

That as we have reason to believe, that God will not totally, nor finally cast off his Church in these nations, whatever their troubles may be; so we have ground to hope, that whatever our troubles be, they will be but of a short continuance.

THE first part of this proposition, *that we have no reason to fear a total or final rejection*, was largely handled above, and I hope satisfactorily also; and therefore I shall supersede saying any thing further to it in this place.

But as to the other part of the proposition, *That our troubles will probably be but short*; it may not be amiss to consider, upon what ground such an hope is founded. And to me, it seems to afford hope this way, to consider, that whatever advantages the *Papal cause* may gain here or there, yet, in the general, it is a *falling interest*, which in the main is declining and decaying. And though I am afraid the duration of the *antichristian* kingdom may be much longer than some writers make it; yet, in the general, we may conclude, that even this cannot be long. And surely, we cannot imagine, that the promised increase and extent of Christ's kingdom can be very far off, after the sweet and favourable prelude thereof which we have seen: For can we imagine, that God will wholly lose the *honour of the great things* which he hath already done for us? which certainly he would in the eyes of an *unbcking world*, if the *seed sown* should lie under the *clods* much longer than the usual time, without any appearance of the *spring*; for then would our *infidels* say, this is come to pass because God was not able to effectuate what he had begun. And after all this, can we imagine that the many *prayers* put up for this will still remain to be unanswered? besides, that the *encouraging presages and hopes*, which many *dying saints* have gone

gone to heaven with, were not put into them, we may be sure, by the Spirit of God *in vain*: and to think that God would suffer them in such a way, and at such a time, to be under the prevailing power of a *delusion*, is what I dare not admit the thoughts of.

And now, having adduced these encouragements here, I shall take my leave of this *subject*, when I have laid before the reader a brief word of *advice and counsel*, with which I shall conclude.

And here, since we have seen our danger, we may easily conclude our duty: For, in the *first place*, we must be sure, whatever happens, to be found in the *camp of Christ*, taking part with the Church, and those that befriend that interest, lest being at any time found stragling from thence, or in the *camp of the BABYLONISH WHORE*, by being partakers of her sins, we partake also of her judgments.

And then, in the *next place*, let us be careful to be found in the *practice of our duty*, doing those things that as Christians we are engaged to do, and with the serious discharge of which we can never be dispensed. Wherefore let it be our constant care to *fear God, and stand in awe of his judgments*; that when, with *Jeboishaphat*, we *fear the Lord, and set ourselves to seek him*, we may come to get such a return from God as he got, *not to be afraid nor dismayed at the multitude of our enemies*, because the battle is the *Lord's*. Let us purify ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, by *washing ourselves in the blood of the Covenant*, that we may be clean: and by putting away the evil of our doings before the eyes of the Lord, that *so we may cease to do evil, and learn to do well*. Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that we may be exalted in due time; for even an *Abab* was regarded for so doing: and the heathenish city of Nineveh had its ruin, on this account, suspended and protracted. And famous was the instance of this sort in the days of *Josiah*, whose *humiliation and*

and fasting was so acceptable to God, as to protract for some time the execution of judgment that otherwise was just at the door. And thus also Hezekiah's bumbling himself before the Lord was the means to ward off that terrible desolating storm of *Senacherib and his army*, which seemed wholly inevitable. And let us to our humiliation and fasting add serious *repentance and reformation*, that it may be evident we are real in our external professions : *Wherefore, let us turn unto the Lord with all our hearts, and bat with weeping, and mourning, and fasting, rending our hearts and not our garments.* And let us withal, fervently and constantly implore God's mercy and favour, by serious prayer and supplication : *For then shall we seek the Lord so as to find him, when we shall search after him with all our hearts.* Wherefore let us not, in our making mention of the Lord, and praying to him, keep silence in the Church's case, neither let us give him any rest, until he arise and make our Jerusalem a praise to the earth.

“ Oh good and gracious Lord God, bestow such a spirit upon this *generation* that the terribleness of “ thy wrath and judgments, and the danger of a “ French and Popish sword, of a sword both foreign “ and domestic, may so awaken us out of our lethargic security and insensibility, that we may turn again unto thee, and seek thy face, until thou make “ the light of thy countenance shine upon us, as an “ evidence of our further deliverance ; that so we “ may be set in safety from those that design and “ seek our ruin, and that thus our *Zion* may be “ built up, and our *Jerusalem* made a quiet habitation for us, in spite of all the designs of evil and “ restless enemies. And for this end, be thou graciously pleased to accept of this weak attempt and “ essay of the meanest of those thou hast counted “ worthy to put into the ministration of thy Church ; “ and so to bless it to those into whose hands it may

THE ROD, OR THE SWORD.

" come, that it may be a means to stir them up to
" the serious practice of the duties of the day and
" time wherein we live. This, O Lord, as all
" things else, is humbly and earnestly sought for
" from thee, upon the account, and for the sake of
" our dear Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. In
" hopes whereof, to thee, in him, be ascribed praise
" and glory. *Amen.*"

F I N I S.

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